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Title : Cetacean conservation issues in Scotland: a survey of public awareness and opinions

Category : Conservation

Student : Not Applicable

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Abstract : In order to determine levels of public knowledge and opinions about threats faced by cetaceans and cetacean conservation issues members of the public in Southwest Scotland were surveyed. Interviews (n=252) were conducted in summer 2001, in both rural coastal and island communities and a major city (Glasgow).

Interviewees were presented with a list of threats to cetaceans and were asked to gauge how serious they considered these to be for cetaceans in Scottish waters.

Oil spills (43.7%), over-fishing (41.8%), marine litter (32%) and sewage bacteria (31.1%) were considered by the public to be the most serious threats to cetaceans. Commercial whaling was generally considered to be only a minor problem with (44% considering it to constitute no threat to Scottish cetaceans). Only 0.8% of respondents considered whale-watching to be a serious threat and 51.2% thought that it posed no threat at all.

There was moderate concern about pollution from aquaculture and land-based sources, and fishery by-catches. Levels of concern about disturbance caused by quarrying, dredging and military activities were generally low, despite these factors being conservation issues in Western Scotland.

The majority of participants (69.4%) were aware of whaling operations currently being conducted by Japan and Norway. There were statistically significant differences in this level of awareness according to participant age, occupation, level of interest in environmental activities and location. Practically all participants were against these countries hunting whales (96.4%).

Interviewees were also asked about the level of protection given to cetaceans by the Scottish government. Only 28.2% considered that they were sufficiently protected (virtually none considered them over-protected: 0.4%). Most were of the opinion that they are not sufficiently protected (45.6%). Of these latter interviewees, virtually all (94.8%) considered that legislation specifically for the protection of cetaceans in Scotland should be introduced.